

GREG FOREST
THE AWY METAL



Greg Forrest: Heavy Metal

9 March – 23 June 2002

The Education Gallery, MTT/Aliant Telecom
Gallery (2)

Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

Curators:

Dale Sheppard, Educator

Ray Cronin, Curator of Contemporary Art

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Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

Cover (detail):

Drum Kit 2002, Bronze, 7 units,
dimensions variable

Director's Foreword

The goal of the Artist-in-Residence Program at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia is to provide a space in which artists can work and interact with the public in projects related to AGNS exhibitions, programs, and collections. The Jack and Diane Smith Artist-In-Residence Studio in our Barbara and Norman Newman Education Centre not only provides space for an individual artist to create new works but also to strengthen the Gallery's relations with the visual art community. This is one of our most popular programs, one that goes to the core of our mission to bring art and people together.

Greg Forrest, as our seventh Artist-In-Residence, brought an exciting project to the studio, and now it is coming to life in our Education Gallery. His *Drum Kit* not only beats out memories of another time, but also brings bronze casting to life. Forrest's re-creation of a rock star's drum kit could be considered by some to be representative of the "who" generation which not only brings us back to the way it was, but reminds us that art can ably express what music can do, with humour and fascination. Thank you, Greg, for giving us a glimpse into the making of bronze sculpture in such a unique way and for your association with AGNS as Artist-In-Residence.

Thanks to Dale Sheppard, Educator and Ray Cronin, Curator of Contemporary Art for assembling this exhibition and ensuring the success of our educational and public programming. Thank you to all AGNS staff who work so diligently on behalf of the gallery and our visitors.

Thank you to The Canada Council for the Arts for their support of this project.

Please take an opportunity to look and learn about Greg Forrest, his creativity, and ambitious approach to bronze casting!

Bernard Riordon
Director

The Artist

Born in Toronto, Greg Forrest grew up in London, Ontario, a city with a rich history of contemporary art. While Forrest was a student at London's premiere training ground for artists, H. B. Beal Secondary School, artists such as Greg Curnoe, Murray Favro, Ed Zelenak, Patterson Ewen, Ron Benner and Jamile Hassan were active in the "Forest City." Nonetheless, after graduating from Beal he eschewed the model of such previous graduates as Curnoe and Favro and moved to Halifax to study at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

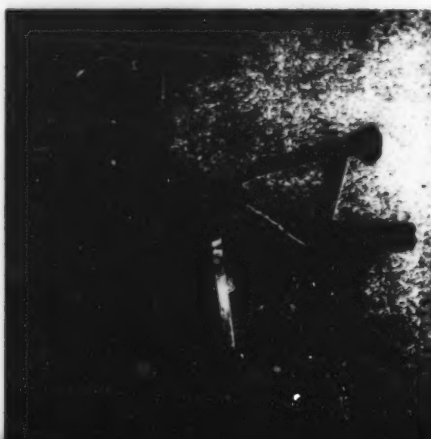
Forrest graduated from NSCAD with his Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1990. He was active in Halifax's art community, with solo and group shows in several galleries and artist-run spaces. He worked at NSCAD before moving to Toronto, but he soon returned east to further his studies. Forrest went back to NSCAD as a student, graduating with his Master of Fine Arts degree in 1995. In the ensuing years Forrest has lived in Toronto, Vancouver and Halifax. He has taught several sculpture courses at NSCAD, was a founding member of the Khyber Arts Society and worked for several years at the St. Mary's University Art Gallery. In 1999 he co-curated the group exhibition *Warrant* and that same year he curated *Hyperjumble*, an exhibition of Halifax painter Kent Senecal's work. Forrest received a Canada Council for the Arts mid-career grant in 2000 and used it to spend 2000-2001 in residence at the Art Institute of Capilano College in North Vancouver. There, he made the waxes for *Drum Kit* and began the process of having them cast. From October 2001 until the end of January 2002 he was Artist-in-Residence at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

Forrest has had solo and group exhibitions across Canada, including *Kraftwerk*, *Desire*, *Object Lessons*, *Critical Mass*, *Town and Country* and 30. His work is included in the collections of the Nova Scotia Art Bank and the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. He lives in Halifax.

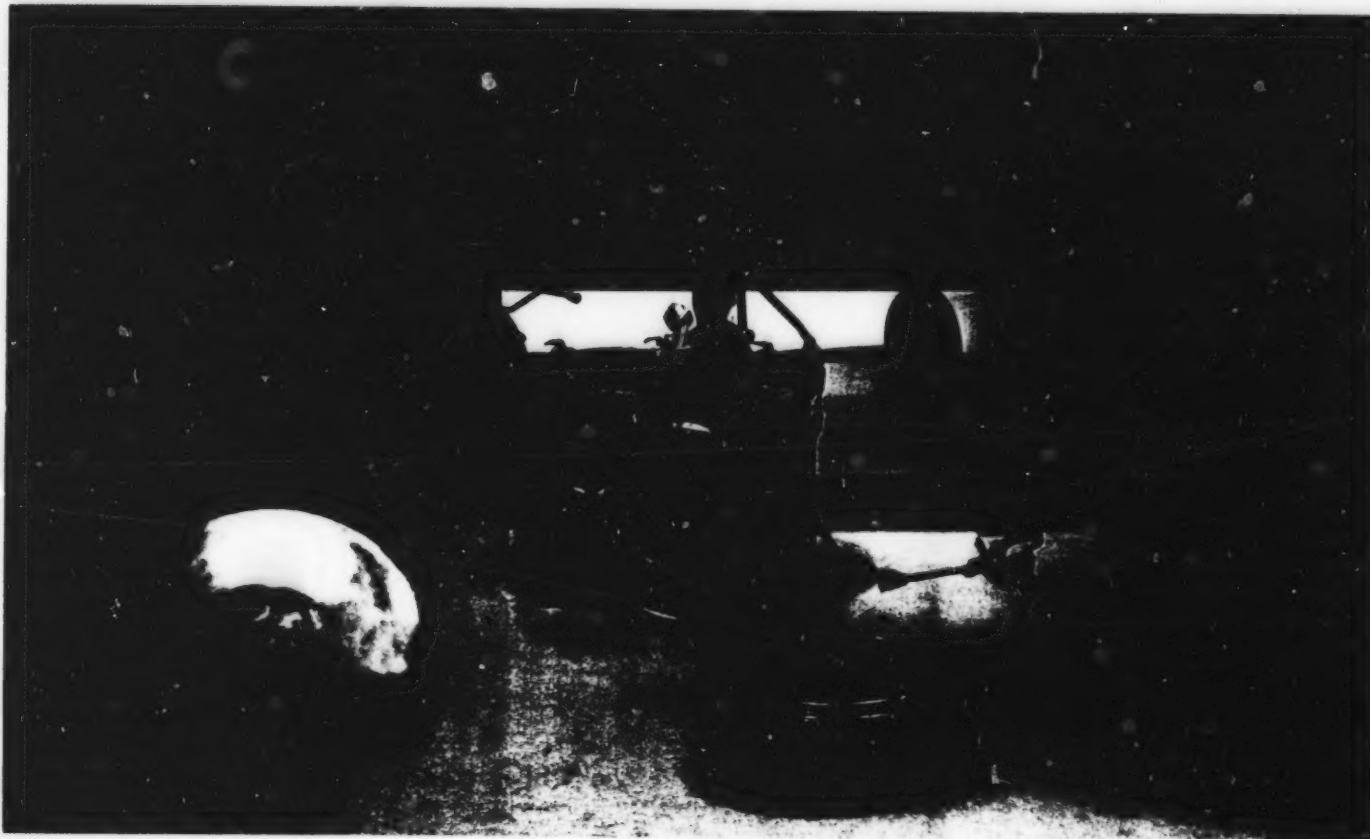
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Greg Forrest



Greg Forrest: Heavy Metal



Drum Kit 2002, Bronze, 7 units, dimensions variable

I can't explain the hold that 60s culture has on us – those of us too young to have lived it at first hand – but explained or not, there it is. I think it's love. Or some other strong emotion, one that mixes attraction with repulsion, love with hate, desire with envy and generosity with need. Yeah, that's love.

Greg Forrest is from my generation – we were still playing with Hot Wheels cars when the Who recorded their album *Live at Leeds*. Demographers call my generation a lost one, a baby bust after the baby boom. "There ain't nothin' in the world for a young man these days," sang Roger Daltrey in Leeds,

the irony probably lost on his original, boomer, listeners, but oh so clear to us *these* days. There ain't nothin' in this world that hasn't already been had by that generation. Call us substitutes, forever in the shadow of our older siblings. They moved out, went to college, got jobs and got married, and we moved into their teen years, right into their rooms, still furnished with their old clothes, their posters, their stereos and, most importantly, their records. Sometimes it feels like we're still there.

After all, popular culture was perfected for that other generation, and we got their hand-me-downs. Popular culture is like a sea, and early on we took to

swimming. Television, radio, movies, comic books and arcade games – that was our context and it didn't matter when the songs provided as our soundtrack were recorded. Bob Dylan, the Stones, the Sex Pistols, Elvis Costello, the Talking Heads, Janis Joplin, the Velvet Underground, Bruce Springsteen, Patti Smith, and yes, the Who, all happened at once for us.

And the Who? Well, the Who were "The Seeker," "My Generation" and "Pinball Wizard." The Who broke their instruments, were arguably the best live band ever, not that many of us growing up in small town Canada ever saw them play live. Their sound was *loud*, was hard rock before hard rock became

institutionalized as *heavy metal*. They had the greatest rock drummer ever, too, and he lived hard and died tragically. So what if they became just another arena band, the epitome of "dinosaur" rock – we could cherry-pick their albums, listen to their *Live at Leeds*, then move on to *Never Mind the Bollocks Here's the Sex Pistols* or the Clash's *London Calling* without feeling any disconnect. That's the way it is when you live by a sea – flotsam and jetsam keep appearing and you make of them what you can. I'm talking about my generation.

So is Greg Forrest. His take on sculpture is populist and sardonic; he's not ironic, but bemused, like our generation. He doesn't step back from his subjects and he doesn't keep a wink and a smirk in his back pocket in case he's taken seriously. No, Forrest is honest with his objects and their viewers, this work is autobiographical and earnest, it's funny and it's serious.

Drum Kit is a monument, a statue of a frozen moment in time, a gesture presented as it may have been when it was still pure, before it descended into mere shtick. The gesture was Keith Moon's – a climax to a performance, an explosive burst of energy that scattered his drums at the end of a concert. It was a gesture, Forrest chooses to believe, that began honestly, only becoming part of a pat routine later on. I suppose that points to a certain romanticism in Forrest's sculpture, but that fits – Forrest may be an artist with an exhibition in a public gallery, but he's also a fan. Forrest talks of Moon as an Icarus figure, someone that flew too close to the sun and burned out in a blaze of publicity. The Greek legend of Icarus is a cautionary tale, as is that of Moon. It's a romantic myth that the route to knowledge is paved with excess, says Forrest. One look at his *Drum Kit* shows his stance: the route to knowledge is paved with work.

Keith Moon earned his reputation as a musician through a mastery of his craft, by the exercise of his art. He became "Moon the loon" when he forgot that art and started performing down to expectations. *Drum Kit* is a monument, but it isn't a celebration. Moon believed a myth, a myth that claimed many other young men of his (and our) generation. That myth is part of our culture, but it holds no claim on Forrest. There's sadness behind this humour, and a bit of nostalgia – after all, says

Forrest, "only the dead can be monumentalized." *Drum Kit* doesn't celebrate a burnout, rather, in part, it eulogizes lost potential.

Sculpture as monument is an old-fashioned idea that Forrest has adapted for his own purposes. *Drum Kit* is a monument, but not to Keith Moon, or at least not to Moon specifically. Rather it is a monument to all the young men who flew too close to the sun. It is a monument to their, to our, innocence, an innocence that was lost almost at the instant it was first expressed. Perhaps it never existed except in the minds of we younger sibs, misinterpreting the culture we inherited, that culture that never quite felt like our birthright.

Sculpture, this sculpture or any sculpture, is an idea manifested in material. Between the idea and the material lies a gulf filled only by labour and technique – by, in short, work. It's another old-fashioned idea that the artist need fill the gap between idea and material with their own labour. Yet work is key to Forrest's approach. He could have bought a drum kit, for instance, or he could have made a mould of one in order to make his waxes. He could have hired a foundry to make those moulds, keeping his contribution down to the idea and a cheque. Instead he painstakingly hand-built every component of the sculpture. Artists of Forrest's generation have had to make a virtue of necessity, adopting a do-it-themselves aesthetic because they had to, (Who else would do it for them?), but mastering such old fashioned techniques as lost-wax casting because they want to. It's like having a drummer in a band rather than relying on a drum machine.

Bronze, the heavy metal of this exhibition's title, fell out of favour as a material for sculpture, and as a result the expertise needed to produce large-scale

bronze work fell into disuse in art schools across Europe and North America. Steel replaced bronze in Modernist sculpture; artists could work directly in steel without having to go through the intermediary processes of working in clay, plaster or wax. Plastics, fiberglass, found objects, plywood and other materials are much more current, still, than bronze. Like the Who, and like rock and roll, bronze is a classic, and a bit of a dinosaur. But that's all right.

Monuments fulfill a very basic human need. A monument acknowledges that, while we, and all our works will eventually f-f-fade away, we were here, once. *Drum Kit* represents a moment frozen in time, but at heart it also represents desire – the desire to cheat time; a desire born of the all too human need to overreach and in overreaching, to transcend our limitations.

Ray Cronin
AGNS Curator of Contemporary Art



Introduction

Heavy Metal combines two of the core features of AGNS Education programs and our Public Programming: The Education Gallery, MTT/Aliant Telecom and the Artist-In-Residence program housed in the Jack and Diane Smith Artist in Residence Studio.

This exhibition, *Heavy Metal*, is a collaborative curatorial project. The traditional roles of curator and educator intertwined and expanded as we worked together to bring the work of Halifax artist Greg Forrest to the public sphere.

The Education Gallery is a venue that provides an interactive component as part of the AGNS's overall exhibition plan. The priority AGNS places

on education and public programs is clearly evident as one enters this gallery space. Exhibitions vary from artwork created through community based partnerships to exhibitions that explore how new technology has affected contemporary artists. One never knows quite what to expect in this Gallery. In an effort to use an integrated model of program development, I thought that Greg Forrest's bronze drum kit was a perfect fit as a collaborative curatorial project with Ray Cronin, Curator of Contemporary Art. The intriguing, and often confusing processes of lost wax, sand casting and ceramic shell for bronze casting are presented through text and visuals in addition to a mini-display of 3-D plasticine forms modelled by visitors inspired by the exhibition, *Heavy Metal*.

The Artist-in-Residence program is a vital component of AGNS programming that affords us the opportunity to have a contemporary artist working on site. Visitors to the Gallery discuss and view the process of art making at various stages as well as the finished work of individual artists as part of their visit to the Gallery. As Artist-in-Residence, Greg Forrest had regular visitors who frequently visited the studio to learn more about the process of creating a bronze sculpture from an original wax.

I would like to thank Greg Forrest for his hard work and his commitment to the exhibition. His patience and unfailing good humour made working on this project a great pleasure. I would also like to acknowledge the support of The Canada Council for the Arts and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

Dale Sheppard
AGNS Educator



The Making of Drum Kit

Greg Forrest was the AGNS Artist-in-Residence from October 2001 through January 2002. While in residence he worked on two projects, one of which was *Drum Kit*. Each component of *Drum Kit* was hand-built out of modelling wax. These originals were then cast in bronze using three different casting processes: Sand casting, lost wax casting and ceramic shell casting. These processes use the same starting point, the wax original, and follow the same procedure for pouring the bronze. Bronze casting is a labour intensive process at every stage. Once a bronze has been successfully poured much finishing work remains.

1 Modelling Wax

An original sculpture is created by working in wax, plaster or clay. As AGNS Artist-in-Residence Forrest used microcrystalline wax, which is designed for bronze casting. Forrest used a hot plate and pot to melt the wax and then made large wax sheets that he in turn used to begin making his sculpture. The wax needed to be soft enough so it could be easily worked but still keep its shape. Various tools are used for this process. Many sculptors use old dental tools. Small chisels, knives, and combs are also useful.

2 Bronze

Bronze is a family of hard, durable metal alloys made by melting copper and tin in varying proportions. Bronze is particularly suitable for sculpture as it can be melted down to be poured into a mould. The works in the current exhibition are made of a bronze alloy called Everdur that is mostly copper with a small percentage of silicon for strength.

3 Sand Casting

The oldest and simplest casting process, sand casting uses fine sand to create a mould. The original (the wax or other sculpture) is sandwiched between two sand-filled boxes. The original is removed, leaving a hollow space for the bronze. The drum skins and cymbals were made using this process.

4 Lost Wax Casting

At least 6,000 years old, the lost wax method of bronze casting dates back to Roman, ancient Greek, and Near Eastern cultures. Using many of the same principles today, the lost wax process links pre-history to present day artists such as Greg Forrest. The lost wax method of bronze casting is a fascinating process that requires time and patience. The following are the basic steps: A master mould is created from the wax. Wax sticks (sprues), which act as funnels, connect the wax sculpture to a pouring cup. Coming off the sprue and attaching to the sculpture are wax "gates" or channels for the molten metal to enter the sculpture.

The wax casting is encased in an "investment liquid" which is made of plaster and sand to create a mould. The wax sculpture coated with investment is placed in a kiln to burn out the wax, which is why it is called, "Lost Wax". The original wax sculpture now no longer exists. If the mould is broken, the artist must begin again. The drum cylinders were cast using this process.

5 Ceramic Shell Casting

Ceramic shell casting is the most high-tech of these processes, using a ceramic "slurry" that is applied in several thin coats to create a strong, light mould. The wax is repeatedly dipped in the liquid slurry until the coating is thick enough to contain the pressure of the molten bronze. The seat, stands and drum pedals were cast using this technique.

6 Pouring the bronze

The "crucible" or large pot, which holds the molten metal, is removed from the furnace, the molten metal is skimmed to remove impurities. The crucible is tipped so that the molten metal pours into the mould through the pouring cup. The hot metal "freezes" quickly in the mould so the whole process has to be quite quick.

7 Finishing

The investment mould is chipped away and the sprues are removed with a hacksaw. The sculpture is cleaned, sanded, and finished. Often there is extra bronze that needs to be removed with small chisels. This process is called chasing. Larger sculptures are cast in pieces and these would then be welded together. A patina can be added to the sculpture to give it the required colour. Possible colours are green, blue, black, brown and even white. The colours aren't painted on, although some sculptors do paint bronze. The patina is actually part of the metal - the same way that a copper penny changes from orange to brown to green over time.

Dale Sheppard
AGNS Educator

